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A TALE OF TRUE LOVE

AND OTHER POEMS

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AND OTHER POEMS

BY

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POET LAUREATE

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TO ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Written after reading, a second time, the posthumous fragment 'Weir of Hermiston.'

I NEVER *saw you, never grasped your hand,*
Nor wrote nor read lines absence loves to trace,
Ne'er with you sate in your accustomed place,
Nor waited for your coming on sea or land.
But this I know, if along unseen strand,
Or anywhere in God's eternal space,
You heard my voice, or I beheld your face,
That we should greet, and both would understand.

So, till that hour, wherever you abide,
On circling star, or interstellar sea,
Or where, from man's imagination free,
There moves no planet and there sounds no tide,
Welcome, as though from friend long known and
tried,
This gift of loving fellowship from me.

January 1900

A TALE OF TRUE LOVE

Ay me! for aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth.
Midsummer Night's Dream, Act I. Scene 1.

I

NOT in the mist of legendary ages,
Which in sad moments men call long ago,
And people with bards, heroes, saints, and sages,
And virtues vanished, since we do not know,
But here to-day wherein we all grow old,
But only we, this Tale of True Love will be told.

II

For Earth to tender wisdom grows not older,
But to young hearts remains for ever young,
Spring no less winsome, Winter winds no colder,
Than when tales first were told, songs first were sung.
And all things always still remain the same,[1]
That touch the human heart, and feed Love's vestal flame.

III

And, if you have ears to hear and eyes for seeing,
Maidens there be, as were there in your youth,
That round you breathe, and move, and have their being,
Fair as Greek Helen, pure as Hebrew Ruth;
With Heaven-appointed poets, quick to sing
Of blameless warrior brave, and wisdom-counselled king.

[1] *Eadem sunt omnia semper.* —LUCRETIUS.

IV

And, tho' in this our day, youth, love, and beauty,
Are far too often glorified as slave
Of every sense except the sense of Duty,
In fables that dishonour and deprave,
The old-world Creeds still linger, taught us by
The pious lips that mute now in the churchyard lie.

V

And this true simple tale in verse as simple
Will from its prelude to its close be told,
As free from artifice as is the dimple
In childhood's cheek, whereby is age consoled.
And haply it may soothe some sufferer's lot,
When noisier notes are husht, and newer ones forgot.

VI

And think not, of your graciousness, I pray you,
Who tells the tale is one of those who deem
That love will beckon only to betray you,
Life an illusion, happiness a dream;
Only that noble grief is happier far
Than transitory lusts and feverish raptures are.

VII

It was the season when aggressive Winter,
That had so long invested the sealed world,
With frosts that starve and hurricanes that splinter,
And rain, hail, blizzard, mercilessly hurled,
Made one forlorn last effort to assail
Ere Spring's relieving spears came riding on the gale.

VIII

For Amazonian March with breast uncovered
Blew loud her clarion, and the wintry host
Took courage fresh and lingeringly hovered
Round vale and hill, wherever needed most;
And ever and anon the raging weather
And wolfish winds re-formed, and onward swept
together,

IX

Loud-bellowing to the thunder-clouds to follow:
But all in vain, for here, there, everywhere,
Primrose battalions, seizing ridge and hollow,
Dingle, and covert, wind-flowers wild that dare
Beyond their seeming, bluebells without sound,
And scentless violets peeped, to spring up from
the ground.

X

And, covering their advance, swift-scouring showers,
Gathering, dispersing, skirmished through the sky,
Till squadrons of innumerable flowers
Thronged through the land far as you could descry.
Then Winter, smitten with despair and dread,
Folded his fluttering tents, sounded retreat, and
fled.

XI

Whereat the land, so long beleaguered, seeing
The peril past, and Winter's iron ring
Broken, and all his cohorts norward fleeing,
Came forth to welcome and embrace the Spring,
Spring the Deliverer, and from sea and shore
Rose the rejoicing shout, "See, April dawns once
more!"

XII

Radiant she came, attended by her zephyrs,
And forth from dusky stall and hurdled fold
Poured lowing kine and sleeky-coated heifers,
To roam at will through pastures green and gold,
Where unweaned lambs from morning until night
Raced round their nibbling dams, and frolicked
with delight.

XIII

High up, on larch and cypress, merle and mavis
Vociferated love-lays sweet as strong,
And the bird dear to Homer and to Hafiz
Proclaimed the joy of sadness all night long;
Vowed each new Spring more Spring-like than the
last,
And triumphed over Time, futile iconoclast.

XIV

Then imperceptibly and slowly rounded
Slim girlish April into maiden May,
Whereat still louder everywhere resounded
The cuckoo's call and throstle's roundelay.
It was as though in meadow, chase, and wood,
God made the world anew, and saw that it was good.

XV

Then feudal Avoncourt, the stern and stately,
Whose dawn deep hidden in undated days,
Not like those palaces erected lately
Whose feet swift crumble, and whose face decays,
Defieth Time's insatiable tooth,
Relaxed grave gaze and wore the countenance of youth.

XVI

It had beheld kings and proud empires vanish,
Male sceptres shattered, princedoms pass away,
Norman, Plantagenet, Lombard, Swabian. Spanish,
Rise, rule, then totter, and topple from their sway;
York and Lancastrian Rose unfold and bloom,
Then canker and decay, and vanish in the tomb.

XVII

It faces the four winds with like demeanour
Norward as Southernward, as though to say,
"Blow from some other. stronger and still keener,
Wherefrom you will, and I will face that way."
And round it as you roam, to gaze perplexed
Each side seems loveliest till you look upon the next.

XVIII

Its present seeming unto ages Tudor
It owes, by unnamed, unknown hands designed,
Who planned and worked amid a folk deemed ruder,
But who with grace enduring strength combined.
Like sturdy oak with all its leaves still on,
When foliage from elm and sycamore have gone.

XIX

Upon its delicate, lofty-jutting portal
Imaginative minds and hands have wrought
Of dead artificers once deemed immortal,
From Southern climes by kings and magnates brought,
When architects and sculptors smiled in scorn
On plain defensive days and called the world reborn.

XX

But time hath mellowed mullion, roof, and gable,
Stone-work without, and wainscotting within;
And nigh them oaken-timbered barn and stable,
Lowlier, withal of countenance akin,
Cluster, for in times olden, meek, and proud,
Being nearer much than now, their kinship was
avowed.

XXI

From it slope woodlands and long alleys shaded,
Saving that all around it and more near
Stretches wild chase by ploughshare uninvaded,
Where roam rough cattle and unherded deer,
That look up as you pass from brackened sod,
Then flee with step as fleet as that whereon they
trod.

XXII

Through vale below from many a source unfailing
A river flows where deft hands cast the line,
Well stocked with wary trout and bolder grayling.
Through smooth, fat pastures dotted o'er with kine
League after league the water winds away,
Oft turning as though loth from Avoncourt to stray.

XXIII

It was in the sweet season that hath ravished
The virgin heart since ever love began,
A maiden, upon whom had Nature lavished
Each fair gift given to maiden or to man,
Roamed all alone through windings of its wood,
Seeking the way to where Avoncourt haply stood.

XXIV

Onward in search of it she went, but slowly,
For who could hasten through so fresh a scene,
With violets paved, the lovelier because lowly,
And pallid primroses on ground of green;
While overhead each bird that hath a voice
Seemed in its own blithe notes to revel and rejoice.

XXV

And ever and anon she gazed around her,
Or knelt to gather some appealing flower,
And to dear God, the Father and the Founder
Of all things good, the all-protecting Power,
Breathed a brief prayer of thanks within her breast,
Feeling she roamed in Heaven on earth made manifest.

XXVI

Sometimes she broke into spontaneous singing,
Such as fond nurse to fretful babe might sing,
Whose close as sudden is as its beginning.
Herself she seemed a portion of the Spring
Which, if she went, would lose the chiefest part
Of that which charms the gaze and captivates the heart.

XXVII

At length she passed from out these paths embowered
To where meek does, young fawns, and shaggy beeves
Ranged amid bracken; but the House, that towered
Full nigh at hand, for intercepting leaves
She still descried not, so, advancing under
An arch of hornbeam, stood in husht, astonied wonder.

XXVIII

For there it rose as silent and abstracted
As though it nothing shared or had to say
With those that shadow-like have lived and acted
Upon the stage we call our later day;
From passing passions thoughtfully aloof,
Through age, not pride, without lamenting or reproof.

XXIX

Then slowly timid, tentative explorer,
Longing to see yet dreading to be seen,
Asudden living figure rose before her
Of manly mould and meditative mien;
Modern, withal with air of ancient port,
As if the same blood flowed through him and Avoncourt.

XXX

"Forgive," she said, "an overbold intruder!"
"I doubt if anywhere *you* would intrude;
But sooth none do on this survival Tudor,
Who visit its old age in reverent mood."
"And that indeed I do. I never saw
Aught that I so admired, or felt for so much awe."

XXXI

"Will you, I round it willingly can guide you,
Unless—and, told, shall fully understand,—
Wander you rather would with none beside you
To mar the silence of the windless land,
Saving Spring's choristers, whose constant trills
One hears or doth not hear, according as one wills."

XXXII

"You know it well?" she asked. "I ought to know it.
Here was I born, here grew to boy's estate,
Pored o'er the page of storier and poet,
All that is big, magnanimous, and great,
Hardened my own, tried my dear Mother's nerves,
Robbed the home orchard, poached my Father's
own preserves."

XXXIII

"And are you now its occupant and possessor?"
"So called, alas! whose ancestors have paid
The final tax, by Death the stern assessor
On all poor mortals equitably laid.
I have a leasehold; no one can have more,
This side at least the vague, still-undiscovered shore."

XXXIV

Thereat there fell a silence on their speaking,
And on they moved, he follower more than guide;
Oblivious she what 'twas that she was seeking,
Since conscious now of manhood at her side.
Withal, so much there was to lure her gaze,
That his on her could rest, nor stint its look of praise.

XXXV

Then when they reached the Jacobean portal,
Back rolled its doors of iron brace and stay,
On grooves that seemed more cut for feet immortal
Than for a feeble transitory day,
And mounted oaken stair axe-hewn, unplaned,
With lion-headed piers unpolished and unstained.

XXXVI

From coffered ceiling hung down tattered banners,
And weapons warlike deadly deemed no more
Were parked on landing; grants of ancient manors,
With charts and parchments of black-letter lore,
Stacked spears and dinted armour; ebon presses
With jealous bolts stood locked in embrasured
recesses.

XXXVII

Chamber on chamber wainscotted and spacious
Was lined with effigies of warriors wise,
Reticent rulers, dames revered and gracious,
Whose fingers wove the silken tapestries,
Time-toned but faded not, that draped the wall
Of gallery long and straight, and square-set banquet-
hall.

XXXVIII

About lay obsolete instruments, wheel and spindle,
When women read much less and knew much more,
Huge logs for early-rising maids to kindle
On deep-set hearths, mottoes of lasting lore
In ancient tongues, Norman, or Saxon stave,
Bidding man live and die, meek, pious, steadfast, brave.

XXXIX

And many a question asked she, always getting
The answer craved for, given prompt and plain.
"But look," she said, "the sun will soon be setting,
And that old dial-hand that doth nor gain
Nor lose, I am sure, in its diurnal pace,
Reproves me I still lag in this enthralling place."

XL

"Then come again," he answered, "at your leisure,"
And led her outward where the ancient pile
Looked as though dwelt within no special treasure,
And owned no spell nor charm save sunset's smile;
Like one of those large natures that betray
No sign that they are made of more than common
clay.

XLI

"And may I ask, your homeward footsteps, whither?
What! there! it is on Avoncourt estate,
And I by shorter path can guide you thither
Than that you came by; fear you to be late.
You lodge with much-loved tenants, for the wife
My foster-parent was in rosy-dawning life."

XLII

"She did not tell me that; but sooth our meeting
Was but two days back, though I quickly saw
That she for you would evermore be bleating
With voice of blent solicitude and awe."
"'Tis so: on Sundays with a spirit meek
She worships God, then me the rest of all the week."

XLIII

Wending and winding under curved ways shaded,
Wider than heretofore, they farmward trod,
While twilight incense all the air pervaded
Round flower-decked altar at the shrine of God,
This sacred Earth, and for approaching night
One star kept watch, as yet Heaven's only lamp
alight.

XLIV

To her it seemed the Real and Ideal
At last were one, and every bird that sings
Joined prayerfully in chorus hymeneal,
Ere folding music underneath its wings.
How little did she guess that ambushed grief
Watched all her thoughts and lurked 'neath every
dewy leaf!

XLV

"Are both your parents at the farmstead staying?"
"Alas!" she said, "like yours, they both abide
My coming further off, and in my praying
Alone survive; my guardian and my guide
My Mother's sister, whom we there shall find,
Most loving and most loved of living womankind."

XLVI

Though of this generation, in his greeting
Was something of the grace of bygone days,
Which, when long passed familiar fashions fleeting,
Maidens will prize and matrons still will praise.
So of him gone both elder and more young
That night held long discourse with sympathetic tongue.

XLVII

But, after visit shortly paid together
To Avoncourt, and welcome shown afresh
To both as one, since oftentimes the tether
Of shortening life enslaving mortal flesh
Her guardian held at home, Egeria roamed
Ofttimes alone through chase and alleys greenly domed.

XLVIII

And it would happen sometimes by frank favour,
Though oftener far by chance, that angel good,
They walked where waters wind and aspens quaver,
Or on the outskirts of some quiet wood,
And, with a noble pride less shown than felt,
He led through lands where long his ancestors had dwelt.

XLIX

Anon they visited the red-roofed village,
A rural road by homely gardens flanked,
Whose male arms were at work on Spring-time tillage,
And children safe in school-house, "Heaven be thanked!"
Their mothers said when coming forth to greet
The wandering pair as these mounted the hamlet street,

L

Where buttressed Church with crenellated Tower
Over the village still kept watch and ward ;
"For these," he said, "inherited have that power,
The pious citadels of peace that guard
The sin-beleaguered soul, and still repel
From humble homes and hearts the ravening hosts
of hell."

LI

Within were monuments of home-delved marble,
Whereon lay figures of his race and name,
Crusaders whose dead deeds no time can garble,
Learning destroy, malignity defame :
Legs crossed, feet resting against faithful hound,
And, at their side, their dames and children
kneeling round.

LII

Then would they wend them valeward to the river,
And he cast line that neither curled nor sank.
Round ran the reel, then the lithe rod would quiver,
And May-fly trout lie gasping on the bank,
Or, like a flying shadow through the stream,
Startled, would pass to pool sheltered from noonday gleam.

LIII

Which pleased her most, for sooth she thought sport cruel,
Yet watched it for the sake of his rare skill,
But happiest when asudden wingèd jewel,
The king-fisher, disturbed near rustic mill,
Darted, and deep into its nest withdrew,
Shortly to issue forth, and, flickering, raid anew.

LIV

So passed the days unnoticed and uncounted,
As louder, longer, later, piped the merle,
And cuckoo oftener called, if harsher throated,
And hawthorn decked itself with loops of pearl.
It seemed a world reborn without its woes:
Woodbine was in the lanes, and everywhere the rose.

LV

All things that are in that seductive season
In them struck root and with them got entwined;
Looking before or after had seemed treason
To the free heart and unconditioned mind,
As daily tightened beyond time's control
That strongest of all ties, the kinship of the soul.

LVI

And deeper into bliss they wandered blindly,
While woe and wet winds kept from them aloof,
As from screened homestead visitings unkindly,
Where old-world windows under gabled roof
Seem gazing at the present from the past,
And wondering how long such happiness will last.

LVII

Ah me! the days of Summer, not of Winter,
The shortest are and swiftest glide away,
And leaves of Autumn, sober mezzotinter,
Linger far longer than the blooms of May.
Time that, when fledged by joy, finds wings to fly,
With sorrow for its load limps slowly, wearily.

LVIII

One evening, as they watched the sunset fading,
"To strangers Avoncourt must never pass,
For that would be dishonouring and degrading,"
Thinking aloud he said: "withal, alas!
Sit by its hearth they must, and much I fear
That there they must abide for many a coming year.

LIX

"No fault of mine nor yet of those now sleeping
In tombs ancestral. Unrelenting time,
That hath the future in its unseen keeping,
Hath lowered the lofty, let the lowly climb,
And swept away the sustenance of my home.
What is there that endures? Go ask of Greece or Rome.

LX

"Mullion from sill, transom from beam, is cracking,
Beauty and majesty their only stay;
And, save new wealth supply what now is lacking,
These too in turn will slowly pass away.
And I must save and strive in duteous ways,
So irksome felt by most in these luxurious days."

LXI

"There is another way, some deem a duty,
None call unworthy," slowly she replied.
"Women there be, gifted with charm and beauty,
On whom hath Fortune lavished wealth beside."
"I am not made like that," he [illegible]ly said;
"I but for love alone should ever woo or wed."

LXII

And, as he said it, on her face he centred
Strong tender gaze, as though to search her soul,
Which straight so deep into her being entered,
She felt a current beyond will's control.
Crimsoning she turned aside, and thus confessed
The secret she had thought to hide within her breast.

LXIII

Out of a cloud long gathering burst a flashing,
Followed by thunder's discontented sound;
And straight they heard slow big round raindrops plashing
On the green leaves o'erhead and emerald ground.
"Hark! I must hasten home," she said, "before
The storm-wrack breaks."—"And I will see you to your door."

LXIV

All through the morrow much he seemed to ponder,
And oft would halt and gaze upon the ground,
Or look out fixedly on something yonder,
Unseen by others, which at last he found,
And then strode quickly on, since he had solved
The doubt that would die out oftener the years revolved.

LXV

"Yes, for she hath that higher understanding
That routs Life's phantoms with a fearless face,
And knows, when spectral enemies throng banding,
The good from bad, the noble from the base.
To-morrow will I offer, ask for, all,
Love, Faith, and Hope can give, whatever else befall."

LXVI

But on the morrow came she not. More lonely,
Wandering, he felt than ever heretofore;
Nor on the morrow's morrow, and he only
Could wait her will, nor wend unto their door
Till wearily some doubtful days crept on,
And then the farmstead sought, to find its guests
had gone!

LXVII

Gone three days back, and none knew why or
whither.
Then he with promptitude unleashed his mind,
In search for trace, now hither and now thither,
But trace or tidings nowhere could he find.
Still unremittingly he sought: in vain
Was search within our shore, was search beyond
the main.

LXVIII

Slowly the glory from the Summer faded,
And ominously leaves began to fall;
And ever and anon harsh gusts invaded
Avoncourt, moaning through deserted hall,
And roaring woefully up chimney wide;
And mute the deerhound clung unto her master's side,

LXIX

Or gazed at him with sad look sympathetic,
As though it too missed what its master missed.
"Ah, Lufra!" said he in a voice prophetic,
"She is gone, and we shall never see her more.
Cling you to me, and I will take you where
Wander awhile I must, wherever I may fare.

LXX

"No more than you can I unmask the meaning
Of hapless things that baffle mortal vows."
Then, sighing, saw he white-haired Winter gleaning,
Amid the crackling drift and fallen boughs
That lay on avenue, chase, and garden garth,
Fuel to feed faint flame upon her widowed hearth.

LXXI

He was not one of those who love to wrangle
Before the populace for place and power,
Or fight for wealth with weapons that but strangle
The nobler passions, manhood's richest dower.
"I will return when wound shall less be felt,
And work among my folk, dwelling where once she dwelt."

LXXII

Farewell he took of wood-reeve, keeper, ranger,
And tenants grave with grief, and some in tears,
And order gave that Avoncourt to stranger
Be leased for maybe many coming years;
Then crossed the vigilant, unsleeping sea
That ranges round our Isle, to keep it great and free.

LXXIII

He lingered not in that vain-glorious city,
Whose Rulers pass the sceptre to the crowd,
But wended to the Land where amorous ditty
By swain at work to maid is sung aloud;
Where life is simple, and unchanging ways
Of tillage still recall loved Virgil's rustic lays:

LXXIV

Where on majestic pedestals the mighty
Marble imaginings of Art august,
Thought-wrinkled Zeus and dimpled Aphrodité,
Exact our homage and command our trust ;
Immortal gods whose never-ending sway
Rebellion cannot shake nor scoffing sweep away.

LXXV

And in that high companionship he slowly
Stifled his sighs and cicatrised his wound,
And, with the griefs the lofty and the lowly
Alike must feel, his share of pain attuned ;
More willingly, it may be, since he knew
He unto love and loss would evermore keep true.

LXXVI

Ofttimes he stood by shrines where peasants kneeling
Told of their sorrows to the Mother-Maid,
Unto celestial sympathy appealing
From the world's pitiless splendour and parade;
And in that sight he resignation found,
With sun, and sea, and sky, and mountain-peaks
around.

LXXVII

So that when nigh upon a year had vanished
Homeward his longing and his looks were cast,
Feeling 'twere base to longer stay self-banished,
Grafting his future on a fruitless past.
And soon his steadfast journeying came to close,
Where Avoncourt amid its unchanged woodlands
rose.

LXXVIII

It had meanwhile been leased to lately wedded
Tenants, unknown to Fame, but well endowed
With what could rescue it from fate so dreaded
Of slow decay and ruin-mantling shroud,
And who already had done much to win
Its walls from storm without, and worm and moth within.

LXXIX

So, as in duty bound, he promptly started
From home prepared for him on his estate,
With cheerful step if somewhat heavy-hearted,
To visit those who lived within his gate;
Ascending through the woodland's winding ways,
That wore more careful mien than in the bygone days.

LXXX

It was the dawn of Autumn, very season
When he from further search for her forbore,
Whom to forget had seemed to him a treason,
Though well he knew he ne'er should see her more.
Sound, sight, scent, yellowing elm, and cone-
crowned fir,
Sunshine and shade alike, reminded him of her.

LXXXI

But, resolute to curb regret, he entered,
And, led through hall and corridor, he wound
To long ancestral gallery, and centred
His curious gaze on what he saw around.
It seemed to have lost no look of days gone by,
Withal to blend young smile with ancient majesty.

LXXXII

Still on the walls the effigies ancestral,
In armour or in ermine, hung unchanged,
With the device of wild boar, wolf, or kestrel,
That once in English forests freely ranged;
With later draperies that seemed to bring
Distance more near and shed a grace round everything.

LXXXIII

While gazing out on well-remembered garden,
Where old yew hedges screened new-planted rose,
Against whose beauty none his heart could harden,
He heard a door soft open and then close.
And, turning, saw Egeria, with a face
Pale as a moon that moves alone through lonely space!

LXXXIV

"Are you a guest," he said, "in my poor dwelling?"
"I am," she answered, "your—your tenant's wife.
Hear me in patience, dear, while I am telling
What tell I must, but tell this once for life."
Whereat they towards each other drew more near:
One spoke, one listened, both without a sob or tear.

LXXXV

"I loved, I love you. Noble since I know you,
Here I confess that I shall love you still;
Since you will never show me nor I show you
More tenderness than now, for such God's will.
Knowing I should, love once avowed, rejoice,
Should not refuse your love, could not resist your voice,

LXXXVI

"From you I fled, and steadfast left behind me
No word to weaken you, no sign, no trace,
Whereby your manliness could following find me.
For well I knew, that day your face my face
Scanned in strong silence, probing to my heart,
Love once confessed, no power could keep our lives apart.

LXXXVII

"And well, too well I knew, for all things told me,
Men's tongues, the air, I thus should wreck your life,
And Avoncourt reproachfully behold me
A selfish bride and paralysing wife;
That duty had decreed a harder fate
For you, for me. If wrong, I know the right too late.

LXXXVIII

"In innocency's life there comes an hour
When stands revealed what it could never guess:
That there is magical and mystic power
To make love strong or leave it powerless;
If felt, if given without one selfish thought,
That Love is Wisdom's self, and all beside is nought.

LXXXIX

"Ask me no more, I beg, than what I tell you:
I am your tenant, at another's will.
How, wherefore, when, on that which then befell, you,
Though I be mute, will understand me still.
Forgive, but ne'er forget me. Now depart,
Till to endurance Time shall mellowed have the smart."

XC

Her hand she stretched towards him, and, low
bending,
On it his lips he reverently laid,
As on some sacred relic pilgrims wending
From far-off land with faith still undecayed.
Then he went forth, and she remained, alone,
Stern Duty unassailed upon its sovran throne.

XCI

But with the morrow's dawn there came the tidings
How that a crafty, freedom-loathing race,
Its schemes unmasked, had come from out its
hidings,
And flung defiance in its Suzerain's face,
Then on his open territories burst,
Proclaiming these annexed unto its rule accursed.

XCII

Then England said, "I must endure no longer
This long-conspiring, now presumptuous brood,
But must assert the Sceptre of the stronger
Against their vapourings vain and challenge rude,
Who have against me their false flag unfurled,
Urged to their ruin by an Empire-envying world."

XCIII

Nor England only, nor main-moated Britain,
But their brave offspring homed beyond the sea,
In righteous wrath arose, and, duty-smitten,
Vowed that their Afric brethren should be free
To think and speak the thing they would, and dwell
Equal and safe around Law's peaceful citadel.

XCIV

Then said Sir Alured, "Against such foemen
I too will ride and strike," and round him drew
All Avoncourt's hard-knit, well-mounted yeomen,
And to his lands ancestral bade adieu.
Beneath him seethed the waters no one barred,
Over the wave-wide track our steel-shod sentries guard.

XCV

And day by day Egeria scans and watches
The ebb and flow of fluctuating war,
And ofttimes sees his name in terse dispatches
Shine among those that most distinguished are.
Then pride and terror in her heart contend,
And low she prays anew, "Dear God! his life befriend!"

XCVI

And when she reads of some fresh deed of daring
That decorates his breast and crowns his brow,
Sparing of others, of himself unsparing,
She weeps apart where no one sees. But now
This Tale of True Love hath been truly told.
May it by some be read, and by it some consoled !

IN THE FORUM

I

THE last warm gleams of sunset fade
From cypress spire and stonepine dome,
And, in the twilight's deepening shade,
Lingering, I scan the wrecks of Rome.

II

Husht the Madonna's Evening Bell;
The steers lie loosed from wain and plough;
The vagrant monk is in his cell,
The meek nun-novice cloistered now.

III

Pedant's presumptuous voice no more
Vexes the spot where Cæsar trod,
And o'er the pavement's soundless floor
Come banished priest and exiled God.

IV

The lank-ribbed she-wolf, couched among
The regal hillside's tangled scrubs,
With doting gaze and fondling tongue
Suckles the Vestal's twin-born cubs.

V

Yet once again Evander leads
Æneas to his wattled home,
And, throned on Tiber's fresh-cut reeds,
Talks of burnt Troy and rising Rome.

VI

From out the tawny dusk one hears
The half-feigned scream of Sabine maids,
The rush to arms, then swift the tears
That separate the clashing blades.

VII

The Lictors with their fasces throng
To quell the Commons' rising roar,
As Tullia's chariot flames along,
Splashed with her murdered father's gore.

VIII

Her tresses free from band or comb,
Love-dimpled Venus, lithe and tall,
And fresh as Fiumicino's foam,
Mounts her pentelic pedestal.

IX

With languid lids, and lips apart,
And curving limbs like wave half-furled,
Unarmed she dominates the heart,
And without sceptre sways the world.

X

Nerved by her smile, avenging Mars
Stalks through the Forum's fallen fanes,
Or, changed of mien and healed of scars,
Threads sylvan slopes and vineyard plains.

XI

With waves of song from wakening lyre
Apollo routs the wavering night,
While, parsley-crowned, the white-robed choir
Wind chanting up the Sacred Height,

XII

Where Jove, with thunder-garlands wreathed,
And crisp locks frayed like fretted foam,
Sits with his lightnings half unsheathed,
And frowns against the foes of Rome.

XIII

You cannot kill the Gods. They still
Reclaim the thrones where once they reigned,
Rehaunt the grove, remount the rill,
And renovate their rites profaned.

XIV

Diana's hounds still lead the chase,
Still Neptune's Trident crests the sea,
And still man's spirit soars through space
On feathered heels of Mercury.

XV

No flood can quench the Vestals' Fire ;
The Flamen's robes are still as white
As ere the Salii's armoured choir
Were drowned by droning anchorite.

XVI

The saint may seize the siren's seat,
The shaveling frown where frisked the Faun;
Ne'er will, though all beside should fleet,
The Olympian Presence be withdrawn.

XVII

Here, even in the noontide glare,
The Gods, recumbent, take their ease :
Go look, and you will find them there,
Slumbering behind some fallen frieze.

XVIII

But most, when sunset glow hath paled,
And come, as now, the twilight hour,
In vesper vagueness dimly veiled
I feel their presence and their power.

XIX

What though their temples strew the ground,
And to the ruin owls repair,
Their home, their haunt, is all around;
They drive the cloud, they ride the air.

XX

And, when the planets wend their way
Along the never-ageing skies,
"Revere the Gods" I hear them say;
"The Gods are old, the Gods are wise."

XXI

Build as man may, Time gnaws and peers
  Through marble fissures, granite rents;
Only Imagination rears
  Imperishable monuments.

XXII

Let Gaul and Goth pollute the shrine,
  Level the altar, fire the fane:
There is no razing the Divine;
  The Gods return, the Gods remain.

ROME, 1899.

POLYPHEMUS

The Cyclops, Polyphemus, son of Neptune and Thoösa, dwelt alone in a cavern on the slopes of Mount Etna, and passionately loved the nymph Galatea. But she loved, and was loved by, the beautiful shepherd boy, Acis, and sported with him on the mountain and in the sea. Polyphemus, in a transport of ungovernable jealousy, sought to destroy both by hurling on them a rock torn from the flanks of Etna. But the gods interposed, and changed Galatea into a mermaid, and Acis into a hillside stream, so that the twain might never be separated.

POLYPHEMUS

"WHERE lurk they now? Either in some green grot,
With cool, moist mosses overhung, that drink
From slowly-welling, never-waning wave
The freshness of their sustenance; or hid

In the snug hollow of some rounded bole,
Chestnut or pine, whose heart corroding time
Hath pared away, leaving the knotted rind
For shelter against sunshine, wind, or rain,
The weather's wantonness; or, haply, couched
Under the veil of newly-wedded vine,
And, like its lissom tendrils, interlaced
The one within the other, palm with palm,
And fingers feeling fondly round the throat
And underneath the tresses, smooth-skinned pair,
Whom unforeseeing heedlessness of love
And insolicitude of youth enthral,
To one vague purpose by themselves unguessed,
Still pasturing on the flowery sweets of life.
I see them neither on the hill, nor yet
Down in the vale, nor on the dimpled beach,
Nor sporting with the dolphins in the wave:

Though this one orb, crafty Ulysses seared,
By Neptune's healing potency restored,
From mainland unto mainland wandereth wide,
Scanning each dip and dingle of the isle,
And every ridge and roller of the sea.
Well, better thus! Did I behold them now,
In noonday heat, their ruddy lips as close
As cherry unto cherry on one stem,
Their eyes one long, unseparating gaze,
Not all the snows on Etna would allay
The fever of my longing."

GALATEA

"Follow me, Acis, follow me, follow,
Over the hillock and down by the hollow!
Follow me, follow, where musk-rose and myrtle
Entangle my tresses and catch in my kirtle;

Onward where cistus and cyclamen mingle,
And hemlock and asphodel gleam in the dingle,
Down to the dip where the brook bends and babbles,
The water-hen nests, and her callow brood dabbles ;
Under the labyrinth hazelnut cover,
Follow me, follow, my light-footed lover !
Thence to the open where sunlight is sweeter,
And there we will prove which is lither and fleeter.
Past the bruised rosemary look for and find me ;
Track me and trace by the fragrance behind me.
See ! I am breathless ; so hither, and hold me,
And close to your tenderness fondle and fold me.
This is the oldest and sweetest of blisses,
To be followed, and caught, and pay forfeit of kisses ;
So follow me, follow ! "

POLYPHEMUS

"The shadows on the silent hillside stretch
Longer and darker, and more sharp and clear
The smokeless cone of Etna cleaves the air,
And soon from snowy breast to brow will flush
Pink as the rose in Galatea's cheek.
I must go gather up my goats, and press
The stream from out the heavy-uddered ewes
Loud bleating for relief. A bubbling bowl
Of vesper milk would cozen any maid,
Any but Galatea, to my side,
While I, myself imperious Neptune's son,
To her recounted legendary tales
Of demigod and nymph when Love was young.
Ah! Love is always young, and I am old;
And any beardless stripling casts a spell

Of fresh enchantment round the nubile heart
That I with all my cunning cannot weave.
To be so wise, withal so little loved!
We blossom for ourselves, we fruit for others!
Nothing avails my knowledge, nor the years
Of intercourse with those elusive powers
That underlie the semblances we see,
Whereby I somewhat to the heart have pierced
Of Nature and Necessity, and wrung
Toll of their secrets. What is left me else,
Weary of insurrection 'gainst the gods,
The far-off, calm, invulnerable gods,
Sailing supine on thunder-sheeted clouds
And canopied by the unpropped dome of Heaven?
Could I to one high purpose fix my mind,
And, when my flock were browsing 'mong the crags,
Or folded for the night, forget my youth

And those desires, the dregs of bygone joy,
That youth, no longer sparkling, leaves to age,
The stars my sole companions and the herbs
Culled in the secret places, and pursue
With passionless resolve the steadfast search,
In planet and in simple, for the key
Of the world's central government, and store
In deathless verse for famishing mankind
The harvest of my reaping, I might then
Bless silent, slow, unsympathising Time
That on my brow accumulates the years
To crown them with tranquillity. But now
I have all the snows of Etna on my head,
And all its panting furnace in my heart.
Where are they now? Did I but penetrate
To the recesses of their amorous bliss,
I, with one blast from this volcanic breast,

Should strew their fondlings on the blackened coils
Of lava down the hillside."

ACIS

"Wake, Galatea, now wake from your dreaming!
On beach and on breaker the moonlight is streaming.
Down in the lucent tide mermaids are singing,
And the seaweed above them is swaying and swinging!
Melody rises and rolls through the shingle,
Where sweet wave and salt wave have meeting and mingle.
Sweetest one, fleetest one, fleetest and fairest.
Come where the black rocks are bleakest and barest,
But curve for your coming 'twixt billow and billow
The softest of couches, with foam-fringe for pillow!
Through the wave, 'neath the wave, over and over,

Dive where the coral gleams pink as the clover
I gathered and gave you from Proserpine's garden,
When Love had displeased you, and prayed you
for pardon.
Wake from your dreaming and haste to the haven,
Where smoothly with gold sand the sea-floor is
paven.
Loosen your girdle, and lengthen your tresses,
And glide through the water that curls and caresses.
Float we and flow we, but moved by its motion,
Till we and the moonlight are one with the ocean.
Wake, Galatea!"

POLYPHEMUS

"Now is the hour when most I feel how lone
It is to be a bastard of the gods,

Not wholly human, yet not quite divine,
Celestially fathered, yet shut out
From the serene of Heaven! While I range
The pathless labyrinth of forest pines,
Laden with logwood for my cavern hearth;
Climb the rough crags betwixt whose smooth, green flanks
The adventurous goats browse wayward; or descend,
Driving them home before my voice; or rive
Time-toughened oaks for virgin honeycomb,
Dripping with golden sweetness; or with care
Curdle the autumn milk in shelving bowls
For winter sustenance; then I forget
The god within me, and on task intent
That needs but mortal energy I live,
Human at every pore, a man—no more.

But now my flock are folded safe within,
And in the snow-cold larder of my cave
Is store for morrow's nourishment; and lo!
Up from the wave rólleth the rounded moon,
To wend her silent, uncompanioned way
Monotonous through Heaven; and with her mounts
The Olympian ichor in my veins, to wake
Ancestral longings. Nymphs as fair as she
Whom strenuous Neptune forcibly bewitched
To be my mother, willingly to me
In adolescent days subdued their hearts
And sported with my strength, for I could bear,
Aye, and could carry still, their flimsy forms
Straight up the lava-loops, and let them gaze
Into the jaws of Etna! That sleek pair,
Who flout me with their fondlings, I could ride
One upon either shoulder, round and round

The various isle, plain, pasture, promontory,
Orchard, and sun-burnt bluff, or thuswise wade
Through torrents raging with the melted snow
From norward rampart ranges: But they love
Only to toy and trifle in the vale.
Heaven is too lofty for their dwarf desires,
And I too vast for puny purposes."

ACIS

"Are you there, Galatea?"

GALATEA

"Yes, here in the moonlight,
Where the wave is as bright as the beach in the noonlight."

ACIS

"You are brighter than either. I cannot descry you
From radiant ripple until I come nigh you.

I lose you, I find you, again you grow dimmer,
Till round me seems nothing but shadow and shimmer.
'Tis your golden-rayed ringlets that baffle and blind me."

GALATEA

"Float unto my voice, dear, and there you will find me.
Here, lock we our hands, love, and float we together,
Or cling, if you will, to my tresses for tether.
We are one upon land, be we one on the breaker!"

ACIS

"Who found Galatea could never forsake her."

GALATEA

"Dear Acis, my Acis! Now wed we our voices,
And sing with the surge as it roams and rejoices.
There are moonbeams below us, and moonbeams
above us,
And the stars in the heavens look down on and
love us."

ACIS

"O fair Galatea!"

GALATEA

"My fond, faithful Acis!"

POLYPHEMUS

"Hark! 'Twas her voice, upsoaring from the sea!
The twain are riding on the moonlit foam,
As is their wont when rolls the rising moon

A radiant roadway right athwart the wave,
For fatuous fancy's forward-running feet
To journey to the goal of its desires.
See, there they float enamoured, hand in hand,
Rising and falling with the heaving tide
As it subsides or surges. Save her voice
Guided my vision, I had now not felt
The torture of their transports, nor discerned
Which is her billowy beauty, which the wave.
Now, by the mighty and majestic gods,
And that wide-weltering if lesser god,
My sea-subduing father, why should I,
Who have the thunders at my beck, and forge
In my fuliginous smithy bolts for Jove,
Live mocked to moaning by that puny pair,
When I from Etna's bulging flanks could wrench,
As, by my pangs unbearable! will I now,

This many-rooted rock, and straightway heave
Destruction on their dallying."

ACIS

"O, where's Galatea?"

GALATEA

"Deep down in the wave,
Where the love-loving gods have submerged me, to save.
I am one with the mermaidens, one with the main,
Shall no more be your playmate on pasture and plain;
The flower-fields of Enna will see me no more,
I may float to the seaweed, but not to the shore.
Come there to me, Acis! I never can be
Immortal, save, dearest, immortal with *thee!*'

ACIS

"I am here on the hillside, in hidden ravine,
Where the mosses are moist and the maidenhair
green.
I am suckled by snow-bosoms warmed by the sun,
Through the reeds and the rushes I ripple and run.
I, too, am immortal, I never can fail;
If my source is the summit, my bourne is the vale.
I am coming, am coming, on hastening feet,
That the sweet wave and salt wave may mingle and
meet;
To your mermaiden-music hill-music will bring
From the full founts of summer and freshets of
spring.
We together shall glide, we together shall gleam,
For you are my Siren, and I am your Stream;

From your fondness my fondness no hatred can
sever,
I shall lap you, and lave you, and love you for ever,
Beloved Galatea!"

Written at ACI REALE, SICILY,
December 1898.

A BORDER BURN

I

WHERE Autumn runnels fret and foam
Past banks of amber fern,
Since track was none I chanced to roam
Along a Border burn.

II

The rain was gone, the winds were furled,
No cloud was in the sky,
So that there seemed in all the world
Only the stream and I.

III

At length upon a grey-green stone
I sate me down to dream,
Till, with its flow familiar grown,
I thus addressed the stream :

IV

" Dear Border Burn, that had your birth
Where hills stand bright and high,
Whose lowlier parent is the earth,
Whose loftier the sky ;

V

" Half-heavenly therefore in your source,
Withal to man akin,
Betraying by your wayward course
Your mingled origin ;

VI

"Why, in a scene so fair as this,
Not linger while you may,
And lengthen out unchided bliss
In childlike holiday?

VII

"Encircled here by native hills,
And fringed by wilding flowers,
With all your playmate sister rills
To wile away the hours,

VIII

"Past glowing heather, silvery sedge,
You hurry on, and on,
Rush at the rock, then leap the ledge,
All eager to be gone.

IX

"For you the mavis thrills the brake,
For you the laverocks soar,
And even snow and sleet but make
You dance and sing the more.

X

"The water-ouzels dip and shoot
Amid your flashing spray,
Where flapping heron, skimming coot,
Forage, and pair, and play.

XI

"The forest doe forsakes the hill,
Companioned by her fawn,
In your clear pools to drink her fill,
As darkness yields to dawn.

XII

"When meadows gleam with burnished gold,
Some tender-bosomed maid
Comes down from far-off manse or fold,
And, under birchen shade,

XIII

"Trembles to tale of manhood brave,
Or courtship long and sweet,
And sometimes in your freshening wave
Will dip her dainty feet;

XIV

"And, deaf to sound from neighbouring glen
Of summer-cooing doves,
Hear but your voice, and deem it then
The voice of him she loves.

XV

"And, be the season keen or kind,
Frowning or fair the sky,
The poet, with his musing mind,
Hither will ofttimes hie,

XVI

"And listening, lost among the fern,
To murmur sweet or strong,
Now not less strong than sweet, doth learn
To modulate his song.

XVII

"And, thus attuned to every string
Nature is skilled to strike,
Mellows the thoughts that comfort bring
To glad and sad alike.

XVIII

" Friends fond and faithful such as these
Why do you long to leave,
For scenes that, since untried, can please,
But lure you to deceive ?

XIX

" The forward quest, the feverish chase,
Foul city, venal mart,
Will cloud the fairness of your face,
And desecrate your heart.

XX

" Here betwixt fern and flower you still
Can wind and wander free ;
There granite banks will curb your will,
And chain your liberty."

XXI

I ceased. But though I paused to learn,
No answer seemed to come,
And, save an onward-bickering burn,
All now again was dumb.

XXII

It rolled and rippled, swept and swirled,
No other sound was nigh;
So that there seemed, in all the world,
Only the stream and I.

XXIII

But, like the babbled words that make
The mother's heart rejoice,
Slowly the stream's soul seemed to wake,
And find a human voice:

XXIV

Till, waxing stronger and more clear
Still as it rushed along,
Its answer sounded on mine ear,
Lucid as poet's song:

XXV

"Here was I born, here nursed and bred,
From here shall carry still
Something of moor and bracken-bed,
Something of heath and hill.

XXVI

"Yet, like to you, who suckled first
Where becks throŭgh boulders wind,
In youth from loving bondage burst,
And left your home behind,

XXVII

"To seek the far-off larger life
Where mind with mind contends,
On peaceful fields, in generous strife,
To further loftier ends;

XXVIII

"So do I quit my native hills,
Red rowan, hawthorn pearled,
My brother braes, my sister rills,
To find a wider world,

XXIX

"And, with a half-reluctant heart,
Leave dingle, dale, and wood,
To bear a meek but manly part
In burdened brotherhood.

XXX

"Why should I selfishly remain
A simple mountain stream,
Or shrink, because some earthy stain
Cloudeth each heavenly dream?

XXXI

"Chide me not, then, nor seek to stay
The current of my soul,
Though conflict check or chafe my way,
The Ocean is my goal;

XXXII

"Where I from sea to sea shall ride,
Shall roll from shore to shore,
And with the Universal Tide
Be one for evermore;

XXXIII

"Yet, by Heaven's Law of Love allowed,
Revolving, to return,
Wafted by wind, and borne on cloud,
Still be a Border Burn."

BEATRICE

I

SHE came into the April air,
And passed across the silvery lawn;
Blithe was her voice, her brow was bare,
And rippled from her radiant hair
The glow and glory of the dawn.
Her footfall scared nor doe nor fawn,
No timid songster ceased to sing;
But, wheresoe'er she strayed or stood,
Her maiden coming seèmed to bring
A wider wonder to the wood,
And more of magic to the Spring.

II

When June is throned, and round her blows
The rambling briar and lily tall,
I saw her watch the buds unclose,
Herself, herself the loveliest rose,
And stateliest lily of them all.
The blackbirds' fluting, cuckoo's call,
She scarcely heard, for trembled near,
And thrilled her wheresoe'er she strayed,
That note more deep, that voice more dear,
That lures to love the listening maid,
When half is fondness, half is fear.

III

Among the rows of ripened sheaves,
And orchard harvests golden-red,

The tapestry that Autumn weaves
From fallen fruit and fading leaves,
Pensive she paced with matron tread.
Low was her voice, but all she said
Seemed strangely true, and deeply wise;
And mute her offspring gathered round,
To gaze into her tranquil eyes,
And listen to the sacred sound
Of mellow words and meek replies.

IV

Now by the wintry hearth she sits,
Grey guardian of the household fire,
Foretells the Future, as she knits,
Then back her loving memory flits
To bygone days and dead desire.
Anon her fingers seem to tire,

And weary sense to droop its wing;

But, though her gaze hath feebler grown,

Nor knows she what the children sing,

She sees the Lamb before the Throne,

And hears the Angels canticling.

WINTER

Now in the woodlands from the creaking boughs
The last sere leaves are loosened and unstrung,
Where once the tender honeysuckle clung,
And faithful mavis fluted to his spouse.
Already dreaming of her winter drowse,
And brooding dimly on her unborn young,
The dormouse rakes the beechmast, and among
The matted roots the moldwarp paws and ploughs.
Over the furrows brown and pastures grey
The melancholy plovers flap and plain;

And, along shivering pool and sodden lane,

As lower droop the lids of dying day,

Like to a disembodied soul in pain,

The homeless wind goes wailing all the way.

FLORENCE

1861—1899

I

City acclaimed from far-off days
Fair, and baptized in field of flowers,
Once more I scan, with eager gaze,
Your soaring domes, your storied towers.

II

Nigh on eight lustres now have flown
Since first with trembling heart I came,
And, girdled by your mountain zone,
Found you yet fairer than your fame.

III

It was the season purple-sweet,
When figs are plucked, and grapes are pressed,
And all your folk with following feet
Bore a dead Poet to sacred rest.[1]

IV

You seemed to fling your gates ajar,
And gently lead me by the hand,
Saying, "Behold! henceforth you are
No stranger in this Tuscan land."

V

And though no love my love can wean
From Albion's crags and cradling sea,
You, Florence, since that hour, have been
More than a foster-nurse to me.

[1] September, 1861. Giovanni Niccolini. Buried in Santa Croce.

VI

And seems that welcome half profaned,
If, in your lap lain oft and long,
I cherish to have something drained
Of Dante's soul and Petrarch's song?

VII

But more than even Muse can give,
Is Love, which, songless though we be,
While the unloving jarring live,
Makes life one long sweet melody.

VIII

And you with love and friendship still
Have teemed, as teem your hills with wine,
And, through the seasons good or ill,
Have made their mellow vintage mine.

IX

But most, while Fancy yet was young,
Yet timely cared no more to roam,
You lent your tender Tuscan tongue
To help me in my English home.

X

So now from soft Sicilian shore,
And Tiber's sterner tide, I bring
My Autumn sheaves, to share once more
The rapture of your rainbow Spring.

XI

I, lingering in your palaced town,
Asudden, 'neath some beetling pile,
Catch sight of Dante's awful frown,
Or Vinci's enigmatic smile;

XII

Then, following olden footsteps, stroll
To where, from May-day's mocking pyre,
Savonarola's tortured soul
Went up to Heaven in tongues of fire;

XIII

Or Buonarroti's godlike hand
Made marble block from Massa's steep
Dawn into Day at his command,
Or plunged it into Night and Sleep.

XIV

Onward I pass through radiant squares,
And widening ways whose foliage shames
Our leafless streets, to one that bears
The best-beloved of English names,

XV

And climb the white-veiled slopes arrayed
In bridal bloom of peach and pear,
While, 'neath the olive's phantom shade,
Lupine and beanflower scent the air.

XVI

The wild-bees hum round golden bay,
The green frog sings on fig-tree bole,
And, see! down daisy-whitened way
Come the slow steers and swaying pole.

XVII

The fresh-pruned vine-stems, curving, bend
Over the peaceful wheaten spears,
And with the glittering sunshine blend
Their transitory April tears.

XVIII

O'er wall and trellis trailed and wound,
Hang roses blushing, roses pale;
And, hark! what was that silvery sound?
The first note of the nightingale.

XIX

Curtained, I close my lids and dream
Of Beauty seen not but surmised,
And, lulled by scent and song, I seem
Immortally imparadised.

XX

When from the deep sweet swoon I wake
And gaze past slopes of grape and grain,
Where Arno, like some lonely lake,
Silvers the far-off seaward plain,

XXI

I see celestial sunset fires
That lift us from this earthly leaven,
And darkly silent cypress spires
Pointing the way from hill to Heaven.

XXII

Then something more than mortal steals
Over the wavering twilight air,
And, messenger of nightfall, peals
From each crowned peak a call to prayer.

XXIII

And now the last meek prayer is said,
And, in the hallowed hush, there is
Only a starry dome o'erhead,
Propped by columnar cypresses.

THE PASSING OF THE CENTURY

I

How shall we comfort the Dying Year?
Beg him to linger, or bid him go?
The light in his eyes burns dim and low,
His hands are clammy, his pulse beats slow,
He wanders and mumbles, but doth not hear.
The lanes are sodden, the leaf-drifts sere,
And the wrack is weaving his shroud of white.
Do you not see he is weary quite
Of the languor of living, and longs for night?

Lo! He is gone! Now lower him down
In the snug-warm earth, 'neath the clods of brown
And the buds of the winter aconite.

II

How shall we part with the bygone Year?
Cover with cypress, or wreathe with bay?
He will not heed what you do or say,
He is deaf to to-morrow as yesterday.
Why do you linger about his bier?
He has gone to the Ghostland, he is not here.
We may go on our way, we may live and laugh,
Round the banqueting blaze can feast and quaff.
The purple catafalque, stately staff,
The dirges of sorrow, the songs of praise,

And the costliest monument man can raise,
Are but for the Spirit's cenotaph.

III

Dust unto dust, He is dead, though he
Was the last of the centuried years that flow,
We know not wherefore, we never shall know,
With the tide unebbing of Time, and go
To the phantom shore of Eternity.
Shadows to shadows, they flit and flee
Across the face of the flaming sun,
The vague generations, one by one,
That never are ended, never begun.
Where is the dome or the vault so vast,
As to coffin the bones of the perished Past,
Save the limitless tomb of Oblivion?

IV

What tale would he tell, could the dead but speak?
"I was born, as I died, amid wrath and smoke,
When the war-wains rolled, and the cannons spoke,
When the vulture's cry and the raven's croak
Flapped hungrily over the dying shriek,
And nothing was seen but a blood-red streak
Betwixt lowering sky and leaden main;
When slanted and slashed the rifles' rain
Upon furrows whose harvest were sheaves of slain;
When the levin's glare by the thunder's crash
Was bellowed, and ever 'twixt flash and flash
The howl of the unspent hurricane."

V

Let the dead discourse with the dead. So ask
How best now to welcome the new-born Year.
She is coming, is coming, and, lo! is here,
With forehead and footstep that know not fear.
She will shrink from no pleasure, evade no task,
But there never was worn or veil or mask
Like her frank fair face and her candid soul.
Do you fathom her thoughts, can you guess her goal,
Her waywardness chasten, her fate control?
She will wend with her doom, and that doom be ours;
So greet her with carol and snow-white flowers,
And crown her with Hope's own aureole.

VI

Yet mind her dawn of the dark, for she,
She too must pass 'neath the lych-gate porch ;
And give to her keeping the vestal Torch,
That may ofttime smoulder, and sometimes scorch,
But rebrightens and burns eternally :
The beacon on land and the planet at sea,
When the night is murk, and the mist is dense,
To guide us Whither, remind us Whence,
The Soul's sure lamp through the shades of sense.
She must tread the Unknown the dead years trod ;
Though rugged the road, yet the goal is God,
And the will of all-wise Omnipotence.

A ROYAL HOME-COMING

NOVEMBER 2, 1901

I

WELCOME, right welcome home, to these blest
Isles,
Where, unforgotten, loved Victoria sleeps,
But now with happy pride your Father smiles,
Your Mother weeps.

II

You went as came the swallow, homeward draw
Now it hath winged its way to winters green;
But never swallow or wandering sea-bird saw
What You have seen.

III

For You have circled the earth with pinions fleet,
The seasons through, and everywhere a throng
Of glowing hearts your coming trooped to greet
With flowers and song.

IV

Over the unchanging sea eight changeful moons
Have moved from shield to sickle, seed to sheaves,
And twice a hundred dawns, a hundred noons,
A hundred eves,

V

Waned to their slumber in the star-lit night,
And ever from land or lake, from wave or crag,
From fixed or floating fort, You had in sight
The British Flag.

VI

And wider, further, onward round the world,
Scouring the field or furrowing the sea,
You found that Emblem, which, where'er unfurled,
Floats o'er the Free:

VII

So that on man, and man's laborious hand,
Nor manacle nor hindrance shall be laid,
But mind with mind, and strand with generous strand,
Contend and trade.

VIII

And, though the shade of treasonable strife
Falls on our homes and theirs, You, wandering, saw,

Young Commonwealths You found, surging with life,
Yet ruled by Law:

IX

Whose blood, infused in ours in War's emprise,
To vindicate one Sceptre, sword, and tongue,—
As ours perchance may help to keep them wise,—
Hath made us young.

X

Fountain of Youth England in mellower years
Hath found and drained, so that She ne'er need know
What Nature feels when Autumn stacks and seres,
Or Yule-gusts blow.

XI

You sailed from us to them, from them to us,
Love at the prow and wisdom at the helm,
August Ambassadors, who strengthen thus
Her Rule and Realm.

XII

Round You to-day a People stand arrayed,
That fain with Peace two wedded worlds would dower,
Therefore rejoicing mightier hath been made
Imperial Power.

SONNET

COULD I but leave men wiser by my song,
And somewhat happier in their little day,
Wean them from things that lure but to betray,
Make the harsh gentle, and the feeble strong,
Shunning the paths where pride and folly throng,
Then would I carol all the livelong day,
And, as the golden sunset waned to grey,
With vesper voice my twilight hour prolong.
But now they hear me heedlessly, or pass,
With hurrying steps, to pomp's ambitious strife

But with chagrin and disappointment rife,
And shadows fleeting as one's breath on glass,
Still with foiled feet and baffled hopes, alas!
Lost in the long vain labyrinth of Life.

WINTER VIOLETS

Lines laid on the Bier of Queen Victoria at Osborne, by permission of His Majesty the King.

HERE are sad flowers, with wintry weeping wet,
Dews of the dark that drench the violet.
Thus over Her, whom death yet more endears,
Nature and Man together blend their tears.

January 25, 1901.

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